

Today's issue of TD

Travel Daily today features five pages of news, including our Sustainability page.

AI mulls CEO switch?

THE future of Air India's CEO Campbell Wilson is in doubt after sources close to the troubled carrier indicated he will soon be removed from his role.

Leaks to local media have suggested parent company Tata Group is on the hunt for a new leader as it seeks to streamline operations following Air India's recent merger with Vistara.

Chief among the rumoured concerns expressed by Tata Group is a well-documented decline in service quality standards.

New Zealand-born Wilson joined Air India in 2022, and during his tenure has endured several major challenges, including the crash of Air India Flight AI171 shortly after take-off last year (TD 13 Jun 2025).

HA unveils upgrade plan

HAWAIIAN Airlines has announced a new five-year, US\$600 million investment plan to overhaul and upgrade the overall passenger experience.

Among the major changes will be an updated app and website launching in Mar, offering customers and agents simpler travel planning, booking and trip management options for key areas like changing flights and redeeming rewards with its list of global partners.

Further funds will be spent on providing a full interior upgrade to the carrier's entire fleet of widebody A330s from 2028.

Enhancements will include new seats, first class suites, a premium economy cabin, and lighting.

The upgrade will also see a Bluetooth-enabled in-flight entertainment system installed with high-definition seatback screens, offering a wider array of movie and music options



alongside its high-speed Starlink wi-fi services.

Hawaiian Airlines revealed that its investment will include buying three of its A330 aircraft off lease as well, supporting the growth of its services across the Pacific.

While much of the US\$600 million will be spent on flight comfort, the experience on the ground will also be getting a major injection across HA's various hubs in the US state.

In 2029, the carrier will build a large premium lounge at the entrance of the Mauka Concourse in Terminal 1 of Honolulu Airport, which it said will "set a new standard of preflight comfort".

Lihu'e, Kahului, Kona and Hilo will also see upgraded seating and amenities installed in '29. AB

Lisbon freezes EES

LISBON Airport has suspended the need for non-EU travellers to use the Entry/Exit System (EES) for three months after battling lengthy border control queues.

The waiting times have previously eclipsed seven hours for arrivals, and caused many pax to miss connecting flights.

Cambodian danger

SMARTTRAVELLER has raised its overall travel advice level for Cambodia, shifting the threat level from the safest advice to exercise a high degree of caution.

The decision was made after a review of the destination in light of an ongoing military conflict with neighbouring Thailand.

"We continue to advise 'do not travel' to areas within 50 kilometres of the Cambodia-Thailand border and reconsider your need to travel within an additional 30km of that border and all of Battambang city."



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Rob McGeary steps away

WELL-KNOWN travel identity Robert McGeary has announced that he is stepping away from APT Travel Group (ATG) after four decades with the business.

McGeary (**pictured**), said now felt like the right time to retire from his role and let the next generation lead the business after spending 33 years working alongside the independent board.



"As I retire from my role [as a director], I'm proud of ATG's position as Australia's premier travel company," McGeary said.

"I had the privilege of working with my father [Geoff] for over 40 years before his passing in 2025 (**TD** 20 Jun 2025), helping grow ATG into what it is today.

"After considering the company's skilled board of six directors - including my sister Lou Tandy - our strong leadership team led by CEO David Cox and adopting the strong five-year strategic plan; I am confident in the position and the direction of the business," McGeary added.

The group's board and executive structure remain unchanged as a result of McGeary's exit, with Simon Jones continuing as Chair, and the ATG executive team maintaining their current roles under the leadership of Cox.

Reflecting on the latest development, Lou Tandy said her brother had "worked tirelessly" alongside their father to build ATG into a successful enterprise.

"I will be working with...our exceptional management team to build upon the incredible foundation my family has created," Tandy said. *AB*

Just a little bit more

SOLO tour operator Just You has unveiled several new escorted tours for 2026 across both Europe and North America.

The Switzerland Scenic Railways and Alpine Winter Wonders tour is a seven-day adventure with three departures between Jan and Mar, with prices starting at \$6,149pp.

The trip includes guided tours of Bern and Lucerne, as well as train trips on the Glacier Express, Golden Pass Train and the cogwheel train to Rigi Klum.

Another tour on offer is the Turkish Treasures: From Istanbul's Palaces to Cappadocia's Wonders, also a week-long trip with three departures between Apr and Sep & prices starting from \$3,299pp.

Alongside coffee and baklava tasting, key sites visited includes The Blue Mosque, Hagia Sofia, Topkapi Palace and Grand Bazaar, as well as day trips to Cappadocia and the Goreme Valley.

To view the full list of new tours on offer, **CLICK HERE**.

Scott Dunn turns 40



SCOTT Dunn has launched The 40 Collection in celebration of the luxury tour operator's 40th birthday this year.

The collection includes a curated selection of 40 standout tours, hotels, and experiences from around the world designed to "inspire discovery, spark delight and create memories that last a lifetime", the brand said.

Senior vice president USA Fiona Batten, who relocated from Australia to the US last year to join the Flight Centre Travel Group brand (**TD** 20 Aug 2025), recently took to LinkedIn to salute the important milestone.

"The vision for 2025 was clear, build momentum - and we delivered," she said.

"We strengthened our presence in the US, achieved solid commercial results, and continued to invest in the foundations that will support long-term growth.

"With a strong foundation in place and growing momentum in

the US, we're stepping into the next phase with confidence and intent," she added.

CLICK HERE to check out The 40 Collection. *JM*

VA checks back in

VIRGIN Australia has returned its check-in and baggage drop off services for cruise passengers accessing Sydney's Overseas Passenger Terminal.

The service allows passengers booked on Virgin Australia flights to check in and have their bags transported from the cruise terminal to Sydney Airport.

VA had previously operated the service in 2018 and 2019 but was forced to pause it because of the COVID pandemic.

"By bringing VA check-in to the cruise terminal, we're able to deliver a smoother experience for cruise pax while also helping ease congestion at Sydney Airport during our busiest travel period of the year," the airline said.

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Air NZ beats Aussies

AIR New Zealand outperformed its Aussie rivals for on-time performance in 2025, according to a new report from Cirium.

The Kiwi carrier had close to 80% of its service run on time last year, placing it at second place on the list of most efficient airlines in the Asia Pacific region, behind only Philippine Airlines.

Virgin Australia was the pick of the Aussie carriers, with 76.54% of flights operating on schedule, marginally ahead of rival Qantas, which recorded 76.51%.

ANA was ranked third, ahead of Singapore Airlines, Japan Airlines, IndiGo and Cathay Pacific.



Fly free with Scenic

SCENIC has launched free economy and business class flights, as well as complimentary helicopter 'flightseeing' across Europe and Antarctica, on selected Discovery Yacht departures during 2026 to 2028.

When guests plan and book early on selected sailings, they can choose to combine both offers on the same journey.

The deals apply to 'Antarctica in Depth' departures in Feb 2027, the 'President's Cruise with Ken Muscat' in Apr 2026, the 'Spain, French Riviera & the Balearic Islands' on 23 Sep 2026, and many more.

Brissy stadium takes shape

THE federal and Queensland governments, along with The Games Independent Infrastructure and Coordination Authority (GIICA), have selected three architects to bring the proposed Brisbane Stadium to life ahead of the 2032 Olympic Games.

Australian firms COX Architecture and Hassell will work with Japan's Azusa Sekkei on the Victoria Park project, which is estimated to cost between \$3.6-\$3.8 billion.

The two local firms are responsible for several of Australia's key projects, including Perth's Optus Stadium, the renovation of Adelaide Oval, and the northern stand of the MCG, while Azusa Sekkei has delivered over 120 stadiums worldwide - the most notable of which being the Japan National Stadium for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

GIICA chairman Stephen Conroy explained the process of selection. "We sought visionary design, innovation, and quality teamwork credentials when we started our selection process for the principal architect, and that is certainly what we have seen through our exhaustive deliberations."

"The selected team possess the appropriate experience in stadium design, alongside outstanding local knowledge and place-making expertise, plus the added global resources that will be required for a project of this significance," he added.

The 63,000-seat Brisbane



Stadium will host the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2032 Olympic Games.

Post-games, the venue will act as the home ground of Brisbane's premier sporting teams, such as the Brisbane Lions, Brisbane Heat and Queensland Bulls.

"Inspired by the iconic Queenslander, this stadium will be a worthy home for the world's best athletes, talented performers and excited spectators during the Games," said the Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Catherine King.

"The new Brisbane Stadium promises to become a landmark venue for the city as its home of global sporting events and international concerts."

GIICA has now begun early design work, alongside project validation work, to ensure the new stadium is ready for 2032. *JB*

Sun Island incentive

SUN Island Tours is continuing its cruising gift card incentive in 2026, with travel advisors across Australia and New Zealand to receive a \$100 gift card for cabins booked with select cruise lines this month.

Call 02 9379 0600 for details.



Window Seat

WHILE hiking is a relatively popular travel activity, most of us would probably not want to do it for more than a few hours, let alone 27 years - which is exactly what one man from the UK has done.

Karl Bushby has almost finished his trek from the southern tip of South America all the way home to England, after setting out on the 50,000km expedition in 1998 with only US\$500 to his name.

The monumental journey took Bushby 15 years longer than he expected though.

He faced several challenges on his path, from pandemic border closures to financial challenges and visa issues - not to mention some very dicey passages, including the Darien Gap between Panama and Colombia, and the Bering Strait between Alaska and Russia.

Despite these obstacles, the Englishman managed to adhere to two rules that he had set for himself: "I can't use transport to advance, and I can't go home until I arrive on foot; if I get stuck somewhere, I have to figure it out".

After moving through the world on foot for nearly three decades, Bushby arrived at a heartwarming realisation: "The world is a much kinder, nicer place than it often seems."



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Travel Daily



Cyprus invests

CYPRUS' 2026 state budget has revealed the country intends to spend €74.6 million (A\$130.26 million) on sustainability projects, destination resilience and community benefits.

The *Cyprus Mail* reported that Deputy Minister of Tourism, Costas Koumis, framed the strategy as a shift in what the country was emphasising rather than a complete change in political policy direction.

He suggested that tourism development would continue as usual, but that sustainability and destination viability would take centre stage, allowing the country to grow tourism responsibly.

Within the budget, €27.7 million (A\$48.4 million) will go to international promotion and awareness campaigns, alongside €14.9 million (A\$26 million) for fund schemes aimed at upgrading and diversifying tourism in Cyprus.

Cultural tourism will also receive a significant boost in funding, including the 'Aphrodite' route.



Elephant Park goes on rampage

AFTER serious allegations of unethical treatment of elephants reported by *News.com.au*, Bali's Mason Elephant Park has hit back, categorically denying the claims published in the article.

In an alert sent out by PR representative Imal Wagner, the park stated that it "asserts the article relied primarily on unverified information supplied by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals organisation (PETA) without conducting independent reporting or direct outreach to the park prior to publication".

It added, "Mason Elephant Park also disputes the article's reliance on PETA as a primary source, noting that no one from PETA inspected or visited the park".

"Nigel Mason, owner and founder of Mason Elephant Park, further challenged claims of

employing an abusive contract elephant handler, saying that not only does this individual not exist, the park does not hire contract elephant handlers."

The statements were part of a more than 720-word defence of the park and its founder after the *News.com.au* article by Ella McIlveen alleged that PETA Asia had uncovered "deeply unsettling accounts of abuse" disguised as philanthropic work at the park.

The article also shared the World Animal Protection Organization's statement that "while Mason Elephant Park and Lodge claims to be Bali's 'only dedicated elephant rescue facility', their last rescue was in 2004", as well as ResponsibleTravel.com's listing of the Mason Elephant Park as one it did not support.

A PETA representative told

News.com.au that it was not just the park that it didn't support, but that, "there are no elephant facilities in Bali that we would recommend as ethical".

While *News.com.au* suggested it had reached out to Mason Elephant Park for comment, the statement from the park argued that claim.

"Despite the article's assertion that Mason Elephant Park was contacted for comment, the park confirms no one was contacted for the story by email, phone, or in person," the statement said.

"Park representatives add that the reporter did not visit the facility and based the story largely on PETA materials."

The park has previously hosted many celebrities including Steve Irwin, Richard Branson, Jean Claude Van Damme, Kim Kardashian and Tony Blair. *DF*

Intrepid on hunt for decarb manager

INTREPID is investing more into sustainability by hiring a decarbonisation manager, with the role currently being advertised, closing 14 Jan.

According to the job ad, the "decarbonisation manager... will be at the forefront of shaping our mission to change the way the world explores, specifically a low-carbon future for the travel industry".

The role will sit within the

environmental division, and will work with global suppliers "to deliver measurable, business-wide carbon reductions".

Intrepid is looking for someone with at least five years experience in designing and implementing decarbonisation initiatives such as EV and solar energy, as well as someone with knowledge of various decarbonisation solutions.

To apply, **CLICK HERE**.

Mayrhofen magic

MAYRHOFEN Tourism Association has announced the Austrian ski field will shift to a ski bus fleet almost entirely made up of hydrotreated vegetable oil powered diesel engines.

Eighteen of 19 buses will be powered by the green fuel, which produces 90% less emissions compared to diesel, while the other is already fully electric.


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Emma relocates her biz



MELBOURNE-BASED travel agency Emma Whiting Travel has relocated its operations to 406 Queens Parade, Fitzroy North, after almost 20 years of being based close by at Clifton Hill.

In a LinkedIn post, the agency's Director Emma Whiting assured long-time customers it will be business as usual.

"While the address has changed, our focus hasn't: thoughtful planning, strong partnerships, and long-standing client relationships built on trust and care," she said.

"This new space supports the next chapter of our business and the way our team works together as we continue to curate meaningful travel experiences for clients around the world." JB

Hyatt sells off Playa

HYATT has closed the real estate sale of Playa Hotels & Resort to Tortuga Resorts, just over six months after it acquired the all-inclusive resort brand (**TD** 18 Jun 2025).

The company sold one of the 15 resorts to a separate entity for \$22 million in Sep and has just sold the remaining 14 to Tortuga for a total of around US\$2 billion.

Hyatt will continue to manage 13 of the properties - all located in the Caribbean and Mexico - for the next 50 years, in accordance with the Tortuga deal.

Javier Aguila, president of Hyatt Inclusive Collection, said the sale is "the culmination of a transformative transaction for Hyatt's Inclusive Collection".

DL ditches NY hub

DELTA Air Lines has pulled the plug on passenger services to and from New York's Greater Binghamton Airport, meaning the hub will soon have no commercial airline customers.

DL's decision is effective 14 Feb, however the airport's management believe they can attract more airlines, even if Delta doesn't return.

Reclaim's US debut

RECLAIM, a start-up offering transportation, logistics, supply chain and storage solutions, has launched its first luggage delivery service in the United States at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

As of 02 Jan, travellers flying from the hub can take advantage of Reclaim's carry-on luggage delivery from their door to the pre-security airport lobby.

During the first quarter of 2026, the company will add remote luggage check-in to its product portfolio and will also expand its operations to other cities across the US and Canada.

"Our mission is to make travel easier, lighter, and stress-free by picking up the traveller's baggage from their homes, hotels, offices, or apartments, delivering it, and doing the check-in at the airport for them," said Akmann Van-Mary, CEO and founder of Reclaim.

Marriott marks 200

MARRIOTT International has marked its 200th property in India with the opening of The Westin Jaipur Kant Kalwar Resort & Spa.

Set across nine acres at the foothills of the Aravali range, the Indian property features 135 guest rooms, suites and private villas, a 24-hour fitness studio, spa, and four dining venues.

Additionally, the resort offers curated activities, such as the Rangilo Aangan evening tea and regional art performances.



MONEY

WELCOME to Money, TD's Tue feature on what the Australian dollar is doing.

AU\$1 = US\$0.671

EXPERTS are betting on the Aussie dollar this year after it finally emerged from a four-year slump against the US currency in 2025.

According to Commbank, pundits predict that the AUD could rise up to US73c this year if US tariff fears continue to ease, which in turn would prompt a rebound in global growth outlook.

Travellers looking to get the best bang for their buck in 2026 should consider Japan for their next overseas holiday, with the AUD now worth around 7% more in the country compared to Nov 2024.

One Aussie dollar bought just 80 yen a decade ago, according to an article in *The Age's Traveller*, whereas today that same dollar buys 19% more.

Looking across the pond, the AUD is now worth nearly 5% more in New Zealand compared to 2024, with our currency also seeing modest uplifts in the US, Fiji, and China.

Wholesale rates this morning.

US	\$0.671
UK	£0.496
NZ	\$1.160
Euro	€0.573
Japan	¥104.99
Thailand	฿21.02
China	¥4.694
South Africa	10.99
Canada	\$0.925
Bitcoin	0.000007